

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT VAYERA · 20 CHESHVAN 5763 · OCT. 26, 2002 · VOL. 10 NO. 4

THIS ISSUE IS SPONSORED BY KOF-K KOSHER SUPERVISION • WWW.KOF-K.ORG • INFO@KOF-K.ORG

PARSHA INSIGHTS

MAKE YOURSELF AT HOME!

“...And behold - three men were standing over him!” (18:2)

There are some people who look like they are giving but they’re really taking. And there are some people who look like they are taking when they’re really giving.

Anyone who buys a \$5000-a-plate charity dinner is giving a lot of charity, but he’s also getting a lot of status mixed in with his sushi.

On the other hand there are people who look like they’re takers but they are really giving.

Once there was a Jewish traveling salesman who found himself in a largely non-Jewish town on Friday afternoon. His business had delayed him way beyond his expectations and there was now no way he could get home for Shabbat. He had heard that there was just one Orthodox family in town where he could spend Shabbat, and as the sun was starting to set he made his way there.

The owner of the house opened the door to him and showed him into the living room. “May I stay here for Shabbat?” asked the traveling salesman. “If you like” replied the host. “The price is \$200.” “\$200!” exclaimed the traveling salesman. “That’s more than a first-class hotel!” “Suit yourself” replied the host.

Realizing that he had no option, the salesman reluctantly agreed. In the short time left before Shabbat the host showed the salesman his room, the kitchen and the other facilities for his Shabbat stay.

As soon as the host left the room the salesman sat down and thought to himself. “Well, if this is going to cost me \$200, I’m going to get my money’s worth.” During the entire Shabbat he availed himself unstintingly of the house’s considerable facilities. He helped himself to the delicious food in the fridge. He had a long luxurious shower before

and after Shabbat. He really made himself “at home.”

When he had showered and packed, he made his way downstairs and plunked two crisp \$100 bills down on the table in front of his host.

“What’s this?” inquired the host. “That’s the money I owe you,” replied the salesman. “You don’t owe me anything. Do you really think I would take money from a fellow Jew for the mitzvah of hospitality?” “But you told me that Shabbat here costs \$200.”

“I only told you that to be sure that you would make yourself at home.”

When a guest comes to your home, his natural feeling is one of embarrassment. No one likes being a taker. When a guest brings a present the worst thing you can say is “You shouldn’t have done that!” Rather take the bottle of wine (or whatever it is), open it, put it in the middle of the table and say “Thank you so much.” By allowing him to contribute to the meal, you will mitigate his feeling of being a taker and you will have done the mitzvah of hospitality to a higher degree.

The mitzvah of hospitality is greater than receiving the Divine Presence. We learn this from the beginning of this week’s Torah portion. G-d had come to visit Avraham on the third day after his *brit mila* — the most painful day. G-d made the day extremely hot so that Avraham should not be bothered by guests. When G-d saw that Avraham was experiencing more pain from his inability to do the mitzvah of hospitality than the pain of the *brit mila* he sent three angels who appeared as men so that Avraham could do the mitzvah of hospitality. When these “men” appeared Avraham got up from in front of the Divine Presence to greet his guests.

Hospitality is greater than receiving the Divine Presence.

Sources:

• Rashi, Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler and others

Three days after performing *brit mila* on himself, Avraham is visited by G-d. When three angels appear in human form, Avraham rushes to show them hospitality by bringing them into his tent, despite this being the most painful time after the operation. Sarah laughs when she hears from them that she will bear a son next year. G-d reveals to Avraham that He will destroy Sodom, and Avraham pleads for Sodom to be spared. G-d agrees that if there are fifty righteous people in Sodom He will not destroy it. Avraham “bargains” G-d down to ten righteous people. However, not even ten can be found. Lot, his wife and two daughters are rescued just before sulfur and fire rain down on Sodom and her sister cities. Lot’s wife looks back and is turned into a pillar of salt. Lot’s daughters fear that as a result of the destruction there will be no husbands for them. They decide to get their father drunk and through him to perpetuate the human race. From the elder daughter, Moav is born, and from the younger, Ammon. Avraham moves to Gerar where Avimelech abducts Sarah. After G-d appears to Avimelech in a dream, he releases Sarah and appeases

Avraham. As promised, a son, Yitzchak, is born to Sarah and Avraham. On the eighth day after the birth, Avraham circumcises him as commanded. Avraham makes a feast the day Yitzchak is weaned. Sarah tells Avraham to banish Hagar and Hagar’s son Yishmael because she sees in him signs of degeneracy. Avraham is distressed at the prospect of banishing his son, but G-d tells him to listen to whatever Sarah tells him to do. After nearly dying of thirst in the desert, Yishmael is rescued by an angel and G-d promises that he will be the progenitor of a mighty nation. Avimelech enters into an alliance with Avraham when he sees that G-d is with him. In a tenth and final test, G-d instructs Avraham to take Yitzchak, who is now 37, and to offer him as a sacrifice. Avraham does this, in spite of ostensibly aborting Jewish nationhood and contradicting his life-long preaching against human sacrifice. At the last moment, G-d sends an angel to stop Avraham. Because of Avraham’s unquestioning obedience, G-d promises him that even if the Jewish People sin, they will never be completely dominated by their foes. The Parsha ends with the genealogy and birth of Rivka.

ISRAEL Forever

DUST, SAND AND STARS

In the vicious wave of anti-Semitic propaganda sweeping the world, Jews, especially Israelis, are being compared to many vile things. The hatemongers have not even hesitated to compare Jews in Israel, defending themselves against murderous terrorists, to the accursed Nazis who murdered six million European Jews.

Jews will this Shabbat hear in the weekly Torah reading a different sort of comparison. They will be uplifted upon once again hearing the Divine promise to the Patriarch Avraham that because of the devotion he displayed in being prepared to offer his beloved son as a sacrifice he would be blessed with an “exceeding multiplication of his seed like the stars of the heaven and the sand upon the seashore.” (*Bereishet 22:16-17*)

Avraham had previously (*ibid. 13:16*) been promised that his posterity would be as numerous “as the dust of the earth”. Sand, dust and stars, our Torah commentaries point out, refer to three different stages of Jewish history. Sometimes Jews are the victims of persecution which ren-

ders them to the dust upon which their enemies tread. It is at such times that they discern the Heavenly message and call to Heaven for mercy.

The sand upon the seashore is where the mighty ocean waves encounter an impassible barrier to their threat to flood the world. This is symbolic of the repeated attempts of our enemies to achieve a “final solution to the Jewish problem” only to be restrained by Divine intervention. The stars represent Jewry in its ideal state, elevated above all the nations and serving as a light for them.

In last week’s column we quoted the exposition of Ramban on the four promises given to Avraham in regard to his posterity and their land. He points out that in the promise following his binding of Yitzchak on the altar Avraham received the additional assurance that his posterity “would possess the gates of its enemies”. This means that no matter how threatened the Jewish people would be they would inevitably overcome their enemies – Israel Forever.

THE TWO-HANDED APPROACH TO SINNERS

In the neighborhood of Rabbi Zeira there lived some sinful Jews. He reached out to them and befriended them in the hope that they would repent their ways. This did not find favor with some of the other sages. When Rabbi Zeira passed away these sinners were distraught. Until now, they cried, Rabbi Zeira prayed to Heaven in our behalf but who will do so now? They took this so much to heart that they became *ba'alei teshuva*.

Rabbi Zeira's attitude towards these sinners was an expression of the interpretation of a Torah passage quoted in our *gemara*. When Yaakov came to his blind father, Yitzchak, to receive the blessings that had been intended for his brother Esav, the exotic fragrance of *Gan Eden* (Paradise) accompanied him, causing Yitzchak to exclaim that he smelled in his garments "the field which G-d had blessed" (*Bereishet* 27:27). The word for garments "*begadov*" can also be read as "*bogdov*" which means the betrayers. Even those who betray G-d with their sins, Rabbi Zeira deduced from this passage, have a scent of holiness in them.

The difference between Rabbi Zeira's attitude towards his sinful neighbors and that of the other sages can be understood, writes the author of *Minei Targema*, by referring to a *gemara* towards the end of our *mesechta* (*Sanhedrin* 107b). The Prophet Elisha banished his attendant Gehazi from his presence because of his sinful action in misrepresenting his master and demanding gifts from the Aramite general Naaman, whom Elisha had miraculously cured from leprosy and whose offer of a reward was rejected by the prophet (*Melachim* II 5). Those sages who adopted a hostile attitude to the sinners saw Elisha's action as a precedent for how to deal with those who behaved improperly. Rabbi Zeira, however, was greater in Torah knowledge than them and was aware of the *beraita* which urges us not to follow Elisha's example of rejecting the sinner with both hands but to rather reject him with the left hand and draw him close with the right one.

Elisha himself, notes Rabbi Yochanan, realized that he had dealt too harshly with Gehazi. The passage in *Melachim* II 8:7 mentions that the prophet came to Damascus without stating the purpose of his trip. He went there in an attempt to influence Gehazi to repent but he was too late because the earlier rejection had caused him to become so corrupt that he felt he could never return.

• *Sanhedrin* 37a

PROPHETS IN THE CAVES

The Prophet Ovadia, whose prophecy is included in the *Trei Asar* (Book of 12 Prophets), was an Edomite convert to Judaism. Rabbi Yitzchak therefore raises the question as to how he merited the levels of prophecy which is reserved for those of Jewish ancestry.

His answer is to refer us to the passage (*Melachim* I 18:4) which describes the heroism of the convert. When the wicked Queen Izevel executed almost all the prophets of G-d in order to promote the prophets of idolatry it was Ovadia who rescued 100 of them. Although he was the officer in charge of the royal household, Ovadia risked his position and his life by secretly hiding these prophets in two caves, fifty in each, and supplying them with food and drink. It was in the merit of such self-sacrificing courage to save true prophets that he himself was blessed with the gift of prophecy.

But why did he not hide all hundred in a single cave and simplify the service he provided them? Two radically different answers are given by our sages. Rabbi Abahu says that no single cave could accommodate all of them so he divided them between two caves. Rabbi Elazar, on the other hand, states that Ovadia took his cue from Yaakov who divided his company into two camps as he prepared for a possible military confrontation with his hostile brother, Esav, and his army of 400 men. Just as Yaakov explained (*Bereishet* 32:8) his strategy that "should Esav come and attack the first camp the other one will have the opportunity of escaping" so too did Ovadia divide the prophets into two different caves.

It may be suggested that Rabbi Elazar rejected the simple approach of Rabbi Abahu because he felt that if the reason for dividing them was so prosaic as a lack of space there would not have been any need for this to be recorded in the sacred writings of *Tanach*. On the other hand, the fact that his strategy was recorded without mentioning the logic behind it provides us with an answer to the question raised by Maharsha regarding Rabbi Elazar's explanation. Why, he asks, does he ascribe Ovadia's action to an emulation of Yaakov's strategy rather than credit him with reaching this logical conclusion on his own? The answer he gives is that since the passage does not cite Ovadia's reasoning as the Torah does in regard to Yaakov, we must conclude that it was not his own logic which guided his two caves strategy but rather that he learned a lesson from Yaakov whose reasoning is already recorded.

• *Sanhedrin* 39b

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why did G-d appear to Avraham after the *brit mila*?
2. Why was Avraham sitting at the entrance to his tent?
3. What were the missions of the three angels?
4. Why did Avraham enjoin the guests to wash the dust off their feet?
5. Why did Avraham ask specifically Yishmael, and not someone else, to prepare food for the guests?
6. Why did the angels ask Avraham where Sarah was?
7. When G-d related Sarah's thoughts to Avraham, He did not relate them precisely. Why?
8. What "cry" from Sodom came before G-d?
9. How many angels went to Sodom?
10. Why was Lot sitting at the gate of Sodom?
11. Lot served the angels *matza*. Why?
12. Why did Lot delay when he left Sodom?
13. Why were Lot and his family not permitted to look back at Sodom?
14. Lot's wife looked back and became a pillar of salt. Why was she punished in this particular way?
15. In what merit did G-d save Lot?
16. Why did Avraham relocate after the destruction of Sodom?
17. Why did Avimelech give gifts to Avraham?
18. Why was Avraham told to listen to Sarah?
19. Why did G-d listen to the prayer of Yishmael and not to that of Hagar?
20. Who accompanied Avraham and Yitzchak to the *akeidah* (binding)?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 18:1 - Avraham was sick, so G-d came to "visit" him.
2. 18:1 - He was looking for guests.
3. 18:2 - To announce Yitzchak's birth, to heal Avraham and to destroy Sodom.
4. 18:4 - He thought they were among those who worship the dust, and he didn't want any object of idolatry in his home.
5. 18:7 - To train him in the performance of *mitzvot*.
6. 18:9 - To call attention to Sarah's modesty, so as to endear her to her husband.
7. 18:13 - For the sake of peace.
8. 18:21 - The cry of a girl who was executed for giving food to the poor.
9. 19:1 - Two; one to destroy the city and one to save Lot.
10. 19:1 - He was a judge.
11. 19:3 - It was Passover.
12. 19:16 - He wanted to save his property.
13. 19:17 - As they, too, deserved to be punished, it wasn't fitting for them to witness the destruction of Sodom.
14. 19:26 - She was stingy, not wanting to give the guests salt.
15. 19:29 - Lot had protected Avraham by concealing from the Egyptians the fact that Sarah was his wife.
16. 20:1 - Because travel in the region ceased and Avraham could no longer find guests.
17. 20:14 - So that Avraham would pray for him.
18. 21:12 - Because she was greater in prophecy.
19. 21:17 - Because the prayer of a sick person is more readily accepted than the prayer of others on his behalf.
20. 22:3 - Yishmael and Eliezer.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PEOPLE

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

SHLOMO – A SOURCE FOR SIMCHAT TORAH

"Shlomo awoke and behold it was a dream." (*Melachim I 3:15*)

How can one be awake and still dreaming? The solution offered by the *Midrash* to this mystery is that when Shlomo awoke in the morning something happened which demonstrated to him that the dream he had experienced the night before had come true.

In his dream G-d appeared to the king and asked him what he wished to be granted from Heaven. Shlomo did not ask for long life, wealth or power, rather for the wisdom of "an understanding heart" which would enable him to properly rule such a challenging nation from the throne he had inherited from his father David at such a young age. This found favor in the eyes of G-d who promised him wisdom surpassing that of anyone



before or after him.

Upon arising Shlomo heard birds chirping and donkeys braying. When he sensed that he was able to comprehend the language of these creatures he realized that his dream had come true. He then came to Jerusalem and made a great feast for all of his servants.

This is the source, concludes the *Midrash*, for celebrating the completion of Torah study. Just as Shlomo realized that a feast was in order upon gaining such great wisdom, so too do Jews who complete an entire year of publicly reading the entire *Sefer Torah*, portion by portion, celebrate their acquisition of wisdom with singing, dancing and feasting on *Simchat Torah*. This is also the source for the festive meal which celebrates the *siyum* completion of an entire tractate of the *Talmud*.

JURASSIC JUDAISM

The following question is one of many that the “Ask - Jewish Information Resource” service of Ohr.edu has received regarding the Torah’s attitude toward the existence of dinosaurs:

Dear Rabbi,

A friend recently asked me how Orthodox Judaism deals with the issue of scientific proof of dinosaurs’ existence. Is there an explanation to be found in the Torah? Your answer or explanation would be greatly appreciated as we are both teachers in a Hebrew day school and the children argue amongst themselves about whether dinosaurs did or did not really exist.

Dear Ohr.edu readers,

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, strange artifacts began to be discovered. They were bones, bones of gigantic and monstrous creatures the like of which had never before been heard of. Sir Richard Owen, the renowned British paleontologist, coined the collective term Dinosauria, Greek for “terrible lizards.”

Even the plant-eating dinosaurs were awe-inspiring. Triceratops, larger than an elephant, had a fearsome array of horns on its armored skull. The large sauropods, Brachiosaurus and Ultrasaurus, weighed more than eighty tons and stood as tall as a five-story building. But the meat-eating dinosaurs were downright terrifying. And none more so than the greatest predator ever to walk the earth. Twenty feet tall and forty feet long, with a massive head boasting six-inch fangs, Tyrannosaurus Rex, the “king tyrant lizard,” was a fearsome beast indeed.

Dinosaurs are terrifying creatures. Fortunately, there aren’t too many of them around nowadays, so there is little to fear. But some Jews do still walk around in fear of dinosaurs. However, this has nothing to do with the dinosaurs’ extreme size or their tendency to crush or eat anything in their way. It has more to do with their very existence. Paleontologists assert that dinosaurs lived hundreds of millions of years ago, while the Jewish calendar sets the age of the universe at under 6000 years plus six creation days.

I remember a young student in yeshiva once drawing me aside in a conspiratorial manner.

“Do you believe in dinosaurs?” he asked me in a hushed tone.

“No,” I replied, surprised. “I believe in G-d.”

I wasn’t sure as to exactly which religion he belonged to (The New Age Temple of the Dinosaur Worshipers, perhaps?), but as far as I’m concerned, it’s only G-d, and religious affairs, that are matters of belief. (And even with those, we’re not talking about blind faith, but rather acknowledg-

ment based on firm evidence and reasoning.)

Dinosaurs aren’t a matter of belief. The fossils really exist; I own one myself. How one *interprets* these fossils is a different matter.

It has been suggested that G-d placed fossils in the ground as a test of our faith. There are two main difficulties with this explanation.

The first objection is that it’s not a particularly good test. As we shall see, there is more than plenty of room for accepting the former existence of dinosaurs and the Divinity of Torah.

The second objection is that, without being overly presumptuous about G-d’s ways, everything that we know about Him tells us that He doesn’t act that way. G-d does not create evidence against His Torah and ask us to blind ourselves to it with a leap of faith. Rather, He presents us with evidence for His existence, and preserves free will by implanting within us a powerful ability to ignore that which is inconvenient.

This point is powerfully presented by Rav Elchanan Wasserman, *zatzal*. He raises the question of how a twelve year old girl or a thirteen year old boy can be commanded in the mitzvah of *emunah*, faith, which the brilliant Aristotle didn’t even manage. His answer is that *emunah* just requires one to draw the logical conclusions from the evidence that surrounds us; if great minds slip up, that is because of personal agendas.

Nature points *towards* G-d, not away from Him. We are told, “Lift your eyes upon high and perceive Who created these!” (*Yeshayah 40:26*); and that “The heavens speak of G-d’s glory, and the sky tells of His handiwork!” (*Tehillim 19:2*). Contemplating nature is not only a means to affirm G-d’s existence, but also, as Rambam explains, the fulfillment of another mitzvah:

This honored and awesome G-d - it is a mitzvah to love Him and to fear Him... And how does one come to love and fear Him? When man contemplates the great wonders of His deeds and creations, and he perceives from them His boundless and infinite wisdom, instantly he loves and praises and gives glory, and he has a great desire to know G-d... And when he contemplates these matters, he instantly recoils and is in awe, and he knows that he is a small, dismal, lowly creature, standing with a minuscule weakness of intellect before the Perfect Wisdom... (*Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah 2:1-2*).

Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi, in his famous work the *Kuzari* (1:67), writes that “Heaven forbid that there should be anything in the Torah to contradict that which is manifest or proved.” Likewise, Heaven forbid that there should be anything manifest or proved which would contradict anything in the Torah. If one is convinced that G-d wrote the Torah and

continued from page five

created the world, then one should fear no scientific discovery. Conversely, if one is afraid of what the scientists will discover, then one is clearly not fully aware that everything discoverable was created by G-d.

But doesn't the apparent age of the dinosaurs contradict the Torah? Well, to claim so, one would have to claim to understand what the Torah actually means with its account of Creation. But this raises many matters of interpretation; for example, how do you measure a "day" when the sun is only created on the fourth one? How do you determine the flow of time when it varies depending on how near you are to objects of large gravitational mass? Since we have so little understanding of these matters, how can dinosaurs frighten us?

Far from being frightened by dinosaurs,

Rabbi Yisrael Lifshitz, author of the *Tiferet Yisrael* commentary on the Mishna, received the news of fossil discoveries in the nineteenth century with delight. As he had undoubtedly expected, they confirmed everything that we knew all along. He writes:

...As regards the past, Rabbi Abahu states at the beginning of *Bereishet Rabbah* that the words "and it was evening, and it was morning" (in the apparent absence of the sun) indicate that "there was a series of epochs before then; the Holy One created worlds and destroyed them, approving some and not others."

The Kabbalists expanded upon this statement and revealed that this process is repeated seven times, each *Shemita* achieving greater perfection than the last... They also tell us that we are now in the midst of the fourth of these great cycles of perfection... [Editor's note: Interestingly, many paleontologists also consider there to have been four eras: the Precambrian, Paleozoic, Mesozoic and Cenozoic.]

We are enabled to appreciate to the full the wonderful accuracy of our Holy Torah when we see that this secret doctrine, handed down by word of mouth for so long, and revealed to us by the Sages of the Kabbalah many centuries ago, has been borne out in the clearest possible way by the science of our generation.

The questing spirit of man, probing and delving into the recesses of the earth, in the Pyrenees, the Carpathians, the Rocky Mountains in America, and

the Himalayas, has found them to be formed of mighty layers of rock lying upon one another in amazing and chaotic formations, explicable only in terms of revolutionary transformations of the earth's surface.

Probing still further, deep below the earth's surface, geologists have found four distinct layers of rock, and between the layers fossilized remains of creatures. Those in the lower layers are of monstrous size and structure, while those in the higher layers are progressively smaller in size but incomparably more refined in structure and form.

Furthermore, they found in Siberia in 1807, under the eternal ice of those regions, a monstrous type of elephant, some three or four times larger than those found today...

Similarly, fossilized remains of sea creatures have been found within the recesses of the highest mountains, and scientists have calculated that of every 78 species found in the earth, 48 are species that are no longer found in our present epoch.

We also know of the remains of an enormous creature found deep in the earth near Baltimore, seventeen feet long and eleven feet high. These have also been found in Europe, and have been given the name "mammoth." Another gigantic creature whose fossilized remains have been found is that which is called "Iguanodon," which stood fifteen feet high and measured ninety feet in length; from its internal structure, scientists have determined that it was herbivorous. Another creature is that which is called "Megalosaurus," which was slightly smaller than the Iguanodon, but which was meat-eating.

From all this, we can see that all that the Kabbalists have told us for so many years about the repeated destruction and renewal of the earth has found clear confirmation in our time.

• *Tiferet Yisrael*, in *Derush Ohr HaChayyim*, found in *Mishnayot Nezikin* after *Masechet Sanhedrin*

Huge and fearsome creatures that they were, dinosaurs can't possibly be a threat to the religious Jew. As G-d's creations, they are another example of His wondrous might. There's nothing to be afraid of.

THE OHR SOMAYACH WEB SITE
www.ohr.edu